DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 047 653 HE 002 032

AUTHOR Peterson, Charles E., Jr.
TITLE The Church Related College: Whence before Whither.
INSTITUTION Association of American Colleges, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 70
NOTE 39p.; Paper presented at the Wingspread Conference on the Contribution of the Church-Related College to the Public Good, December, 1969

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Church Related Colleges, Community Involvement, *Higher Education, *Historical Reviews, *Private Colleges

ABSTRACT

This paper considers the history of the church-related college in the United States: the importance of the denominational role in the founding of these colleges, the circumstances of their founding and growth, and the role of financial support because of affiliation with a denomination. The vision of the church-related college, this paper suggests, has been modified through the years by changes in denominational polity and attitude; by forces of geography, control, and public favor; and by the financial arrangements that provided the pragmatic matrix of the college's affiliation with its sponsoring denomination. There are, however, three issues that require an explanation before the true dimensions of the church-college's relation to the public good can be outlined. Each of these issues reflect the image the nation as a whole has of the church-related college. They are: (1) the image of church-related narrowness; (2) the image of educational isolation; and (3) the image of confused secularization. (AF)

ED047653

The Church Related College: Whence Before Whither*

Charles E. Peterson, Jr.

It is provocative, not to say paradoxical, to be concerned with the history of the church-related college in the age of the "now" generation. In many of its aspects the current world of higher education is anti-historical. "Tell it like it *is,*" we say, not like it *was.* I take it that no extensive justification of an historical approach to the problem of "The Church-Related College and the Public Good" is necessary; it is the sense that we are both the inheritors and the victims of our past as church-related institutions that brings us together at all.

What service do we require of history? Most of us would disallow Henry Ford's contention that history is "bunk," but would we be more receptive to this interpretation of the past:

> . . . the church-related college has stood historically against the very factors which have gnawed at the foundations of great civilizations and brought great countries to their knees.
>
> The church-related colleges have stood and will stand as the legions of historians, legislators, and educators continue to pass by. They will fail when democracy itself fails–when it is wrong to work hard, to make a profit, to accept responsibility, to be philanthropic, to pray, to determine right from wrong, to be concerned for one's fellowman, and to challenge.[1]

I suspect we would shrink back from embracing either extreme, neither claiming that history has shown us to be the seat of all virtue and the salvation of the republic, nor discarding institutional reminiscences as worthless.

The fall-out of history comes to have more significance if seen in the light of the Maryland case where one college of four was judged to be free of church relatedness to the degree that financial aid might be secured. The so-called Connecticut case

*In the interests of readability I have attempted to document sparingly, though the topic suggests a much more complete annotation.

[1]Brown, Robert W., writing in the Methodist publication *Trustee,* March 1969.

HE 002 032

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

involving four Roman Catholic institutions is still pending, but the same issues of historic and present sectarianism are at stake.

The recent New York legislation commonly known as the Bundy law provides one more evidence of current legislative thought on an institution's historic fealty to its sponsoring denomination. The principle here is significant for future action between church and state. But the financial grants made directly to the fifty-two initially-certified institutions are not themselves inconsequential, especially if projected and capitalized as the income from endowment at present rates of return. The message can not have failed to reach the thirty-three institutions whose applications are still under scrutiny in terms of freedom from sectarian control.

Eligibility for such aid did not escape the notice of the trustees of Hartwick College in Oneonta when a formai request was made for severance of the historic affiliation with the local synods and the national body of the Lutheran Church in America. Founded in 1928, Hartwick had no formal ties with the denomination, though relations were close and cordial: the first presidents were Lutheran clergymen; courses in religion had a Protestant, if not Lutheran, flavor; and many Lutheran young people attended the institution in the past forty years, though probably not in the same numbers as found in some other colleges under the same sponsorship. The fact that the synodical contribution to Hartwick's 1968 budget was 1.17% of operating costs may have been as influential in the friendly separation as the fact that less than one in five of the Hartwick students is currently of Lutheran persuasion.

The point needs no laboring. Financial stress is only one reason for the examination of the past in search of an understanding of the present. It may have been the failure to construct from the past an operational and philosophical stance that caused an institution like Canterbury College in Indiana to close after five years of failing to secure support or understanding from either its denominational sponsor or from its local constituency.[2]

---

[2]Beeler, Kent D., *Canterbury College, 1946-1952: Its Decline and Demise* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, 1969).

And it is the search for a modern defensible posture for the church-related college which has sparked position papers prepared by such denominational representatives as Edgar Carlson, Wesley Hotchkiss, Arthur Ben Chitty, Myron Wicke, and others. We do need such self-conscious sorties into our past to "think out loud" about the nature of church-college relationship, to determine for ourselves whether we blend in with, or fight against, the stream of American higher education as it is now flowing.

To talk about the history of the church-related college is not easy, as many of my correspondents in the course of the preparation of this paper pointed out to me sympathetically. There is no such thing as *the* church-related college, first of all. Over forty church bodies sponsor colleges in this country and at least a dozen institutions have joint sponsorship. Within the college family of any one denomination there are wide divergences in size, nature of control, quality of educational program, students, and facilities. If the Christian college is in fact only a special case of the community of educational concern within the liberal arts tradition, it is still an instance which defies historical delineation with precision.

The situation is made more difficult by the vagaries of language. Terms such as "college," "university," "denomination," "church," "sect," "secular," "sacred," "theology"—even "education"—have not only an historical slipperiness but contemporary looseness which can only complicate and muddy discussion. But we have no better tools at hand.

Again, the mines of church-relatedness have been worked unevenly. For instance, our knowledge of the church-related college in the antebellum period is much more extensive than in the period after 1860. Tewksbury's oft-quoted study[3] surveys the college-founding mania of the period before 1860; a similar study seems not to exist for the last half of the century and very little has been written in the history of the church college in the early years of the present century. Limbert's survey of denom-

[3]Tewksbury, Donald G., *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1932).

inational policies and support patterns for higher education[4] needs to be brought up to date in light of the church mergers and ecumenical progress of the last forty years. Though the age of the filiopietistic institutional history may be passing, even a recently-published college history drew from a reviewer the judgment: "Statements like these can but leave the reader in anguish." Frederick Rudolph is probably right in pointing out the nonsense purveyed about the church-related college in the absence of hard facts.

In the midst of the chaos and confusion a theme suggests itself. It derives in part from the attempt of the court in the Maryland case to assess the "flavor" of an educational institution. More particularly, it stems from the thesis established recently in the Holmes Lectures at the Harvard Law School delivered by Professor Alexander M. Bickel of the Yale Law School.[5] Professor Bickel has suggested a means of viewing the current activities of the Supreme Court which has promise for our understanding of the history of the church-related college.

The Supreme Court, according to Professor Bickel, has always been guided by an inner vision which has seldom been articulated to the public but which has nonetheless provided the focus for the decisions which the court has reached in the public's interest. The vision centered around the America of the future and originally was characterized by judicial concern for the sanctity of property. In more recent years the decisions have supported the idea of the egalitarian society. The court has been certain that, however acrimonious the debate at the point of its decisions, history will eventually vindicate the actions as fulfilling the inner vision.

Unfortunately, says Professor Bickel, the court has tended to be inflexibly idealistic about the projection of its vision into decisions. It has failed to take into account the changing nature of American society and the fact that even the best decisions in

---

[4]Limbert, Paul M., *Denominational Policies in the Support and Supervision of Higher Education* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1929).

[5]*New York Times*, October 10, 1969.

terms of pure jurisprudence may risk public rejection if the findings of the court run counter to or ignore the experiences which are shaping the society. Thus, to the judicial mind constrained to uphold the neatness of the idealist decision, the modifications (flaws, if you will) of experience sacrifices the beauty of the law. To the public whom justice is to serve, the modifications of reality make the findings of the law tolerable and indeed workable. Imperfection works to the common good.

Professor Bickel's thesis is suggestive of a theme which helps to interpret the historical development of the church-related college.

The inner vision of what the college might be was never entirely delineated, but it found expression in the thrust of the nation toward the creation of an America which was the Protestant variant of the Christian tradition. In the course of unfolding the vision it was modified or flawed by a number of factors: denominational stance; circumstance of founding; patterns of financial support; and others which we see less clearly. The vision was substantially altered. The experience of the church college would not go unnoticed. The altered vision was traumatic for some, sacrilegious for others, and exhilarating for a few.

Professor Bickel holds that the court finds its real function in the attempt to adapt the absolutes of the law to the realities of the society served. I suggest that the church-related college finds its purpose in the acceptance of the modifications forced upon it in the creation of a more responsive, more humane institution. Further, I suggest that the real usefulness in the reconstruction of segments of the history of the church-related college lies not in catering to our antiquarian whims but rather through providing the sort of historical insight which will help us to turn historical processes to our advantage in the present and for the future. In the past, the colleges were retrospective rather than projective in relation to their experience; they were emotional rather than analytical in regard to their own institutional dynamics; they were reactive instead of responsive to the needs of their society and ours. With the help of history we may do better.

Some Unquestioned Answers

The Denominational Role

A number of general histories of higher education[6] give the development of church-related higher education in more detail than I can muster here, assuming that the reader needs such rehearsing at all. We know, for instance, of the struggles of the colleges of the "covenantal period," ranging all the way from Henrico College in Virginia which found disfavor with the local Indians to Yale and Princeton, founded by those who looked askance at Harvard's erring ways.

We read of the "Great Awakenings" of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with the growth of colleges spawned by the oratory and spirit of evangelism. We need no reminding that the Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Dutch Reformed, Unitarians, and others with a legacy of an educated clergy and people were early in the field, often fighting the forces of the frontier for the establishment of learning and piety. We know that the church transformed the concept of Manifest Destiny into religious terms and pushed westward, this time with Methodists, Baptists, Disciples, Friends, and other latecomers to higher education hoping that evangelical fervor would make up for a tardy start.

We know further that, in spite of the growth of the public university with its vocationalism and seeming godlessness, the march of college building proceeded at a pace so that over eight hundred colleges were established between the Civil War and World War I. And this in a time when the scholarship of the church college was being tested by Darwinism and the creation of new fields of knowledge, and when institutional commitment to higher education was being tested against the concern of most denominations for the implications of the social gospel. We know that in recent years colleges have come to be the prized possessions of churches which only lately have been convinced of the

---

[6]See, for instance, Brubacher, John S. and Willis Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition,* second edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); and Rudolph, Frederick, *The American College and University* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962).

value of higher education: Churches of Christ, Assemblies of God, Church of the Nazarene, and the various Pentecostal groups.

Denominational stance and policy have been important in the growth of the church-related college, though the evidence suggests that such corporate influence has been considerably less than is commonly believed. Albea Godbold[7] provides us with a useful measure for assessing the "strength" of a denominational body for initiating and supporting colleges. Real strength requires, according to Godbold, (1) a conviction among the leaders of the body about the importance of education; (2) a sufficiently large membership to successfully underwrite higher education; (3) a denominational organization which can encompass higher education; and, (4) wealth enough for the task. Where there was a marked deficiency of one or more of the factors, the chances of success in college founding and maintenance were substantially reduced.

Thus, we can see that the Episcopalians historically believed in education, but were sufficiently short on other factors that their colleges never equalled in numbers or enrollment those of other major denominations. The Presbyterians, on the other hand, scored well on all four criteria with the result that college founding and support moved apace with the growth of the denomination. While Godbold's criteria have quite obvious deficiencies (how else to account for the remarkable denominational support of some of the recently formed small denominations?) they are suggestive of the importance of a brief glance at denominational positions on at least two of these criteria, numbers one and three.

It is true that the preparation for the ministry loomed large in the minds of sponsoring groups. William and Mary was to furnish its colony and church with a "seminary of Ministers of the Gospel" to educate the youth in good manners and to propagate the faith among the Indians "to the glory of Almighty God." Yale was dedicated to the task of "upholding and propagating of the Christian Protestant Religion." Davidson, founded in 1838, was concerned that "the great and leading object shall be

---

[7]Godbold, Albea, *The Church College of the Old South* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1944).

the education of young men to the gospel ministry." Pacific University, a product of Congregationalist missionary activity in the West, opened its doors in 1854 "chiefly to acquire and perpetuate a strong religious influence by educating those who will become ministers and missionaries of the Cross."

Before we place too heavy an emphasis on the "pre-seminary" role of the denominational colleges, it is well to remember that after Yale fulfilled its propagational mission it was committed to instruction in the arts and sciences so that the students "may be fitted for Publick employment both in Church and Civil State." Proficiency in the learned languages and the liberal arts and sciences was the basic objective at Princeton; the ministry is mentioned scarcely at all. The Methodists, following the admonition of Wesley to "unite the two so long disjoined, knowledge and vital piety," established Cokesbury College with the promise of

> forming the minds of the youth, through divine aid, to wisdom and holiness; by instilling into their tender minds the principles of true religion, speculative, experimental, and practical, and training them in the ancient way, that they may be rational Scriptural Christians. [8]

It seems clear that Asbury had the vision of founding colleges, not to serve the interests of Methodism alone, but rather to act as beneficent agencies for all of society.

Through the history of the church-related college it appears that most denominational statements have been broad enough to encompass far-ranging educational activities. Where such policies have been parochialized—and they undoubtedly have been—it seems often to have been the response of the local college and its administrators. Surely the statement of purpose of Luther College which appeared in English for the first time in the catalogue of 1883:

> The institution owes its origin to the growing demand for educated men who could preach the Word of Life to the rapidly increasing Norwegian population of the country.
>
> The chief object of the College is to meet this demand, but it also

[8]Gross, John O., *Methodist Beginnings in Higher Education* (Nashville: Board of Education, The Methodist Church, 1959), p. 18.

> aims to afford the advantages of a liberal education to any youth desiring to avail himself of the same.[9]

despite its ethnic obligation, is not far in its inherent breadth from the statement from the catalogue statement of a few years back from Eastern Nazarene College:

> At Eastern Nazarene College we seek, in each member of our community, to enlighten the mind, to enhance the quality of personality, to enkindle a never-ending search for truth, and to enable each, out of Christian love and concern, to serve mankind creatively and responsibly.[10]

In short, with regrettable lapses into denominational self-pride, the motivations of church-related colleges as put forth by national bodies and by institutional founders have been sufficiently broad to permit a quality education within the framework of liberal arts, growing vocationalism, and church service. When this has not been the outcome, local factors and personalities may well be suspect.

Akin to the denominational thinking on the purpose of colleges was the matter of the usefulness of education and the range of men to whom its benefits ought to be extended. The churches with a tradition of an educated ministry had no particular trouble with this as President James Walker of Harvard indicated in stating that the college "must make the obvious distinction between Christianity considered as a means of enlightening and civilizing men in their relations to each other and the world and Christianity considered as a means of eternal salvation to individuals." Both of these he felt worthy and legitimate functions of the church-related college.

It did not come as easily to the Methodists, whose *Book of Discipline* in 1784 held that "gaining knowledge is a good thing, but saving souls is better." By the time the Methodists recognized the shortsightedness of their attitude toward a learned ministry and reversed their course in the 1830's, the seed had been well sown. Peter Cartwright, speaking from the Illinois frontier, was

---

[9]Nelson, David T., *Luther College 1861-1961* (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1961), p. 143.

[10]Catalogue of Eastern Nazarene College, 1965-1966.

reflecting not denominational policy but local sentiment when he said:

> I do not wish to undervalue education, but really I have seen so many of these educated preachers who forcibly reminded me of lettuce growing under the shade of a peach tree, or like a gosling that had got the straddles by wading in the dew, that I turn away sick and faint.[11]

Cartwright was a vanishing breed; though individual evangelists might mourn the ways of the devil in learned men, the denomination's position did favor joining "knowledge and vital piety" in individuals and in institutions.

The Baptists, too, characteristic of the non-intellectual church bodies, did an about face on the value of education as the nineteenth century moved toward the twentieth. In 1784 the Kehukee Baptist Association in North Carolina resolved:

> Education is not essential to the qualifications of a gospel minister. It is a good thing in its place, and forms no objection to the character and qualifications of a minister. God calls a man to the knowledge of Christ in the pardon of sin, without human learning or with it, as seemeth good in His sight, and in like manner He calls a Christian to the gospel ministry. God is not dependent on human education in either case. If He has use for a learned man He calls him. He never calls a man and sends him to man to be qualified.[12]

By the time Jonathon Going was inaugurated as president of Denison in 1838, it was clear that a choice might have to be made under certain conditions: "With all my friendship for education and all my zeal for its promotion, give me morality though coupled with ignorance in preference to immorality connected with the highest intellectual attainments." The forced choice, however, was becoming more remote. At the century's end the Baptists were linked in cooperation with the Rockefeller millions in the building of the University of Chicago and any real doubt of the importance of learning vanished. They would undoubtedly have shared the zeal of the Roman Catholic institutions who were viewing the value of education in a new way—as a means of breaking out of the ghetto of immigrant low-culture to a more affluent

---

[11]Cartwright, Peter, *Autobiography* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 64.

[12]Godbold, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

Americanism–of the Lutherans who were moving from instruction in the native tongue to classes taught entirely in English, and even of the fundamentalist church groups who in the early years of this century were concluding that the pursuit of education under the auspices of the church was not tantamount to a compromising of one's soul beyond redemption. With local aberrations, to be sure, the commitment of the denominations to education as a personal and corporate good was sure.

In one other area, control of the governing board, the role of the national denomination seems to have been more modest than the accumulated myth might suggest. There was the case of Luther College where, well into the 1930's, the regional synod maintained firm control of the institution, taking official cognizance of minute details of daily operation. Similarly, Elmhurst College [13] suffered under the close supervision of its sponsoring group until a new constitution was structured with the formation of the Evangelical and Reformed Church in the 1940's. Even then the church was initially unhappy that only three-quarters of the trustees needed church approval. In each case, the fortunes of the institution seemed to have picked up appreciably with the loosening of control, but they were more or less local strictures that needed relaxing.

Because of the strength of the denomination and the influence of Princeton, the Presbyterians came to dominate the life of their institutions–or thought they did. In 1831 a church spokesman claimed that the church had possession of a large majority of the colleges of the nation; twenty years later the claim was made more specific: two-thirds of the colleges were directly or indirectly under denominational control. But the local situation may have belied the national pride. In 1847 the Secretary of the Board of Education deplored the fact that the number of colleges under strictly Presbyterian control was so small and expressed the

[13] I am indebted to Wesley A. Hotchkiss for calling my attention to Elmhurst College as a church-related college which is in many ways typical of the evolving institution in relation to its sponsoring denomination. A recent history of Elmhurst is found in Denman, William F., *Elmhurst: Developmental Study of a Church-Related College* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Syracuse University, 1966).

hope that all institutions would commit themselves to the management of the church instead of to a "comparatively irresponsible body of self-perpetuating or state-elected trustees." The growing insistance on local autonomy was clearly enunciated for all Presbyterians to hear when President Patton addressed Princeton alumni in New York and issued his own declaration of independence: ". . . While I hold my place as the head of your alma mater I will do what in me lies to keep the hand of ecclesiasticism from resting on Princeton University." There were cheers from those assembled.[14]

Breadth of denominational outlook and control was the concern of the Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education at the West, which throughout its twenty-five years of operation aided and saved many of the midwestern church colleges of today.[15] The 1858 annual report of the Society stated its position:

> The grand point to be attained . . . is that the charter of each institution aided by this Society shall be equally open for the election of the Trustees from either or all of the denominations concerned in its establishment; and that it shall be free from the organic control of any ecclesiastical body.[16]

The Society was apparently satisfied that its standard had been satisfied at such institutions as Wabash, Marietta, Beloit, Wittenberg, Oberlin, Heidelberg, and Ripon. The Society relied on both reports from the institutions and on observations from visiting teams to the colleges themselves.

As a matter of fact, the growing sectarian sharpness after the 1740's more than once worked to foster breadth in the boards since it became necessary to placate hostile factions through inclusion in governing bodies. Kings College, Anglican

---

[14]Wertenbaker, Thomas Jefferson, *Princeton 1746-1896* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1946).

[15]Peterson, Charles E. Jr., *Theron Baldwin and Higher Education in the Old Northwest* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Johns Hopkins University, 1960). The Society's scrutiny of the control of member colleges was careful; aid was frequently withheld until a suitable broadening of control occurred.

[16]*Annual Report* of the Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education at the West, 1858.

by birth, had on its first board ministers of four other denominations. Brown's board, though dominated by Baptists, included Congregationalists, Anglicans, and Quakers. Union College was founded in 1785 by Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Dutch Reformed working together. Its first charter stipulated that the majority of trustees should never be from one segment of Calvinism and that the president should not hold a pastorate while in office.

Oberlin evidenced an increasingly meaningful pattern in the mid-nineteenth century through its ties to Congregationalism, not through legal dependence–both polity and theology would have precluded that–but through the personal affiliations of the local leaders who came to influence the college's operations. This pattern of friendly association and low degree of denominational oversight sent into the current century a group of institutions well suited for new organizational forms which has outgrown narrow sectarianism on the local or national level. Other church bodies and college boards could hardly have been oblivious. Roman Catholic colleges were late to heed the message, but this can be at least partially explained by their traditional reliance on the expertise of the priest in matters dealing with religious education, and in the growing sponsorship by the teaching orders of the church which as "self-perpetuating bodies with a natural disinclination to organizational harakiri [have] simply retained in their own hands control of the institutions they established." [17]

By the time denominational boards of education began to assume some responsibility for the supervision of the church's higher education affairs, it was too late to establish tight national control, even if this had been stated policy, which it was not. Hamilton had broken relations with the Presbyterians in 1893 and Wesleyan retracted its commitment to Methodism in 1907. The boards, consequently, were left with the functions of giving counsel to member institutions, attempting to raise academic standards (as the Methodists did through the University Senate), and studying and reporting on the state of higher education to the

[17]Hassenger, Robert, ed., *The Shape of Catholic Higher Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 30-32. The chapter by Philip Gleason is a particularly good short account of the growth of Catholic higher education in this country.

parent church. In time former Chancellor Tolley of Syracuse, referring to Methodist-related universities, could say regretfully, yet with pride: "ours is the last important group of Protestant church-related universities. Unhappily, it is not clear that they will remain Methodist related. They will be nonsectarian. They will be more and more institutions in the public service." [18]

The evidence suggests that the quest for nationally focused tight control of church colleges has almost always been futile; it simply moved against the stream of self-determination which has lately characterized the churches themselves. Where denominational repressiveness did exist—and it did—it was more the result of local parochialism and defensiveness than of national church policy. Edgar Carlson set forth a position which is both currently useful and historically informative when he wrote recently: "We have disavowed a view of the relation between the colleges and the churches which would permit viewing them as agencies of the church in preference for a covenant relationship in which each is recognized to have its own function but a common commitment and point of view on crucial concerns."[19]

That there have been instances of repressive denominational relations to colleges history amply shows. Yale, after all, did have to contend with Thomas Clap, hard-bitten and completely orthodox, who brought the young college to the brink of ruin through his insistent efforts to play off one denominational faction against another. And Horace Holley at Transylvania did run afoul of Presbyterian antagonism and resigned, with the result that the college fell eventually into Methodist hands. But in Holley's case, his difficulty was at least partially due to his habits of high living, his ensuing dispute with the governor, and with his personal leanings toward Unitarianism. Again, I would raise the question of national policy versus local circumstance.

---

[18]Tolley, William P., in "The President's Bulletin Board," publication of the Board of Education of the United Methodist Church, July-August, 1968.

[19]Carlson, Edgar M., *Church Sponsored Higher Education and the Lutheran Church in America* (New York: Board of College Education and Church Vocations, Lutheran Churches in America, n. d.), p. 62.

The case of Princeton may push the explanation further. Why did Princeton fall from its eminence under John Witherspoon, with its magnificent contribution of learned men to the new nation, to a point barely thirty years later which is described by its historian Wertenbaker as being its nadir? The conventional answer has been to blame the narrowness of Presbyterian polity and practice. And perhaps this is so. But it can also be seen as a localized sort of narrowness that saw the appointment of Ashbel Green as president at a time of great institutional need. Green, who in his own student days at Princeton was filled with sorrow that he was the only professing Christian in the student body, was totally incapable of meeting the college's needs for curricular reform, for a sane disciplinary policy, for better teaching, for fresh insights into the function of a college which Witherspoon had seen clearly. Clearly Green was aided, abetted, and directed by his trustees, a group scarcely more able to fathom the college's problems than himself. But they were Princeton's trustees first and foremost and their operation of the college reflected Presbyterianism not writ large, but writ exceeding small. The General Assembly could and did wring its hands over Princeton, but when the plan for a divinity school incorporated within the college came before it in 1808, the assembly decided not to tinker further with the college but to go the way of a separate seminary.[20]

I would hypothesize that the inner vision of the church-related college did become flawed, but that the flawing was the product of local circumstances primarily. I would hypothesize that denominational statements about college founding were surprisingly broad in their phrasing, that denominational recognition of the value of education preceded its acceptance in the farflung churches, that denominational stance toward institutional control was initially flexible, and though subjected to all the stresses of internal sectarian strife, moved steadily toward a lessening of contractual mental sets and the fostering of affiliational compacts—or even less formal ties. The evidence suggests, I think, that denominational leaders from quite early days recognized, for sometimes quite practical reasons, that extreme sectarianism was not likely

[20]Wertenbaker, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

to lead to eminence in higher education, either for denominational systems or for individual institutions. The major branches of Protestantism, at least, wanted to make a virtue of necessity as rapidly as possible.

Unquestionably the vision was imperfect. Where it was, I think that local factors can be isolated as readily as sweeping national issues. Where boards of trustees acted repressively, they did so as less than capable representatives of the best thinking of the denomination. Where presidents failed to measure up to their charge, as often as not they revealed themselves to be lesser men ill-suited to the administration of a system of education they only dimly understood. Where tests of academic freedom arose, they were sparked as often by bickering forces inside the college as by heretic-baiting denominational bigwigs. The flawing of the vision was, as often as not, a product of local geography, local church leaders, local politicians, local finances, local manias, and local believers, parents, and students.

Circumstances of Founding and Growth

That the patterns of early college founding were important needs no special pleading; we have all lived long enough with the burden—or heritage, if you prefer. Someone has suggested that the chief characteristics of the church-related college seen in the perspective of history are some of these: (1) primary constituency drawn from the denomination served; (2) courses in religion required for literate churchmanship; (3) required devotional services; (4) strong personal influence on the students by faculty; and (5) tradition of the preacher-p.. sident. Though these criteria have become increasingly unsatisfactory as the church college has evolved historically, they serve to remind us how many of the aspects of the life of the college were under the more or less immediate supervision of the college and its neighboring patrons. The influence of national denominational body, though effective in persuasion, was remote in terms of functional operation.

The Methodists gave early recognition to the impossibility of national supervision when in 1820 the General Conference called upon all the annual conferences to establish literary institutions within their borders. The conference, a local body, was given the

right to control the institution in such a manner as found possible. The local bishop was given the right to appoint traveling preachers to serve as officers and teachers in the colleges. [21]

The Presbyterians, a connectional church, went West with their Calvinist Congregational brethren to found colleges under the unstable Plan of Union of 1801. The Presbyterians were occupied with such matters as doctrinal orthodoxy and correctness of form while the Congregationalists turned their attention to theological liberalism and social reform. While Presbyterians were debating predestination and closed communion in the colleges, their partners in this unequal yoking were fighting the evils of liquor and slavery. For our purposes it is enough to notice that while Presbyterian aggressiveness won control of a number of colleges from the Congregationalists prior to the Union's breakup in 1852, it is the concept of the college operated by the latter which has come down to us as the optimal model of the associational, prophetic relationship between church and college. Rudolph points out that this denominational group, with the exception of the Baptists perhaps the least organized nationally, was unusually successful in founding nonsectarian colleges which came to the present ready to assume leadership in matters of curricular reform and altered church relationships. [22]

Baptist style represents a lower case congregationalism. They were a numerically large but scattered and decentralized church. By 1860 their one million members represented 3.5% of the population of the nation. Their single-minded concern with evangelism overcame their theological diversity to make them powers in the forming and nurturing of locally-focused colleges. In most instances, the college under Baptist aegis was really a college-community alliance, the community substituting in some ways for the absent national parent body. The result was not one of coordinated denominational movement to found colleges, but rather a haphazard series of essentially local ventures which had from the start a generous admixture of non-religious motivation. Even when state associations of Baptists were involved, an effort

---

[21] Gross, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

[22] Rudolph, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.

was made to work out agreement with local forces for the support of the college.[23]

The Baptists were fractionated by Free Will adherents who broke off to found Hillsdale College, by Seventh Day Baptists who were active in the founding of Alfred University, and by the serious defection of the Disciples who were filled with zeal for the founding of colleges in the South, Midwest and West. Because of an insecure local base many of these institutions failed; national strength, had it been willing, was not up to the task of support.

Even a college like Kenyon, ostensibly the child of a church with a strong hierarchical bent, seems never to have had its institutional decisions made by the church as a whole. Typically these were local decisions, and even when in the late nineteenth century the bishops of the dioceses of Ohio contested for seats on the board of the college it was still a contest kept within the bounds of the state.

Denominational polity was one thing; geography and tactics were others. The fortuitous and often promotional nature of college founding is implied in the comments of one immigrant to Illinois who noted that "a settler could hardly encamp on the prairies but a college would spring up beside his wagon." Even when the church gave conscious thought to college founding, the outcome was often unpredictable. Francis Asbury seems to have had a knack for locating colleges in out-of-the way spots. He would have said that this was an attempt to protect the young students from the vices and temptations of the world; the result of unfortunate location was that all the colleges founded within the first thirty-five years of the Methodist Church's life came to nought. Similarly, Furman University tried three different locations in or near towns of 500 before coming to rest in the larger Greenville. Mercer and Wake Forest selected sites where there were no settlements at all, and Beloit, founded in 1845, was located 500 miles from a bank and three days' drive from the nearest city.

---

[23]Potts, David B., *Baptist Colleges in the Development of American Society 1812-1861* (unpublished doctoral dissertation Harvard University, 1967), p. 12. In addition to his treatment of Baptist institutions, Potts contributes considerable supporting evidence for the impact of "localism" on colleges of all denominations.

Both Philander Chase of Kenyon and Theron Baldwin, representing interdenominational interests, thought this isolation might be an advantage. Said Chase:

> Unless we can have some little means of educating our pious young men *here*, and here being secure of their affections, station them in the woods, and among our scattered people to gather in and nourish our wandering lambs, we have no reason to hope for a continuance of the Church in the west.[24]

Baldwin, whose efforts to aid struggling colleges were always based on local conditions of management and piety rather than in denominational connection, put it this way:

> It is one of the glories of American colleges, that they are not concentrated into one vast University, but scattered far and wide among the people; each one filling its sphere, availing itself of local associations and local sympathies, and standing up there as the visible and ever present representative of liberal and Christian learning.[25]

Some church colleges have through the years been able to turn location to an advantage. More often their enclave status as a protection from a secular culture has proved a handicap both to the college and to the supporting public. The result has been the historical creation of a false dichotomy which, false though it is, has had immense operational strength. Thus, cities and universities (especially the "new" university of the late nineteenth century) have come to represent progressivism, modernity, and "openness" to culture, while the rural and small church college has seemed to be the resort of the innocent and the stronghold of traditionalism in education. Even a college like Elmhurst, founded in 1871 in the suburbs of Chicago, seems to have been unable until quite recently to fully capitalize on its sub-urban location, seemingly the best of both possible worlds. In Elmhurst's case the proximity to the city was relied upon chiefly for a supply of commuting students in hard times and as a fringe benefit for recruiting faculty.[26]

---

[24]Smythe, George Franklin, *Kenyon College: Its First Century* (New Haven: for Kenyon College by the Yale University Press, 1924). p. 16.

[25]Tewksbury, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[26]Denman, *op. cit.*, p. 539ff.

The same tendency toward defensiveness and isolation in the Catholic college was reinforced by the many exhortative references by Protestants to the twin menaces of the mid-nineteenth century and later, infidelity and Roman Catholicism. Although this was often embedded in the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny, there could be no doubt that wariness, even hostility, was the correct response to the institutions of the immigrant church. "The majestic West must be educated," said one writer. "If Christianity does not do it through her literary institutions, Infidelity will." Lyman Beecher spoke for many Protestants when he exulted, "To plant Christianity in the West is as grand an undertaking as it was to plant it in the Roman Empire, with unspeakably greater permanence and power." [27]

The localized college foundings led to unbridled competition for students, for money, and for public support through the churches. By 1840 the nine Revolutionary colleges had grown to more than one hundred. Amherst and Williams contended for New England's support; Western Reserve and Oberlin sought Congregational favor in Ohio; Washington vied with Jefferson in Pennsylvania; and the numerous rivalries of sectarian colleges in Tennessee and Kentucky defy counting. In some areas public and private institutions were seen as complementary, not competing; sectarian squabbling foiled the chances for long-range alliances. In 1829, for instance, the Methodists launched an attack on Indiana College charging that the president and faculty were Easterners and Presbyterians, and, worst of all, opposed to Andrew Jackson. They demanded their share of the college's limited professorships, citing their denominational strength in the locality. The upshot was the withdrawal of any state support from the college for forty years. [28]

Abner W. Clopton, agent for Columbian College (later George Washington University) probably typified the narrowness and competitiveness of the church-related colleges, though he and others of his time would prefer to have seen it as denominational

---

[27]Tewksbury, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-74.

[28]Schmidt, George P., *The Old Time College President* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930), pp. 38-39.

fidelity. He deplored the lack of Baptist colleges with the resulting pressure on Baptist families to send their sons to other denominational colleges. Numbers of these young men, he said, "have returned home under the influence of strong anti-baptist prejudice–confirmed in anti-baptist principles."

American colleges were definitely institutions of the local community. Harvard, William and Mary, and Yale were products of their local provinces; their aim was not to supply a continental stock of educated men, but to provide well for their own regions and hope that the nation's interests would be served by other colleges doing the same. The maintenance of a local and religious stance was not easy, however. Many of the church colleges were rent by anti-slavery disputes, anti-Catholic machinations, and growing sectional distrust. Struggling for support they were the targets of those who would broaden their scope, perhaps make them into public institutions or at least statewide agencies of education under denominational control. In a number of instances the actual removal of the institution to a more favorable location was proposed. Such plans brought the inevitable confrontation between denomination and community.

The outcome of the removal disputes was predictable. Seldom was an institution picked up bodily and transplanted, but the decision to remain in place often carried with it some concession to a wider definition of religious affiliation. Thus, Denison began to think of itself as an Ohio Baptist college. In 1856 Bucknell's supporters argued that the university was designed, not simply for the immediate neighborhood, for "*The Baptists of Pennsylvania as a Denomination.*"[29] Even so, in most states there was competition for the support of the denomination with the result that whatever the concessions made to the church, the practical support had to come from a region less than statewide in size.

The very American mixture of local and denominational forces in permanently located rural colleges undoubtedly created an anomaly in our national cultural development. It fostered strong local sentiment and patronage for the church-related

[29]Potts, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

college and more than occasionally a proprietary interest which was to prove restrictive. On the more positive side, it created institutions which saw themselves as the functional base of the total system of higher education and it created through its focus on the activities and fortunes of the college on the local hilltop a growing public sentiment in favor of education at all levels. The church colleges benefitted as much as did the public institutions from this broad base of public sentiment. Indeed, deprived of the public's interest in and tolerance for the local denominationally related college, we would have no occasion to discuss that institution's part in the public good.

The Role of Financial Support

It is clear that there has been an historically close relationship between control and support of church-related colleges on the one hand and the programs and purposes of these colleges on the other. Identification with the denomination seems to have been a financially pragmatic thing for many institutions, forcing the college to do what was needed for survival without undue reference to national policy and purpose. Colleges failed because at the same time their constituencies, local, state or national, were withholding adequate financial support, they were also imposing restraints which made it difficult for institutions to seek other sources of aid. In some cases the withholding of support was the result of disapproval of the program and emphasis of the college; in others it seems to have been the flagging of parent denomination support for higher education itself, at least in competition with other claims for church benefactions. Whatever the reason, undue restrictions drove off supporters and killed some institutions. Ironically, within a matter of months a public institution had often taken its place. [30]

It is picturesque, if more than a little sad, to view the financial history of the church-related college as being summed up in the account of how Julian Sturtevant, the longsuffering president of Illinois College, fed his large family on bread crumbs

[30]Kinnison, William A., "Toward Maturity in Christian Higher Education," *Liberal Education,* vol. LV, no. 2, May 1969, p. 320.

dipped in molasses following the panic of 1837. But it would be equally unrealistic to overlook the church college's traditional susceptibility to the ups and downs of the American scene. They were affected by the economic slumps of 1837, 1857, 1887, and 1929. Wars, too, took their toll. Many colleges did not survive the Civil War, though relatively few of them were physically destroyed. Marshall College in Georgia and Cherokee Baptist College, founded by Georgia Baptists in 1853 and 1854 respectively, never reopened once the war was concluded. A stronger institution like Wake Forest was forced to close for a time after 1862 and many northern institutions were put in desperate straits because of declining enrollments.

Aid, when it came, was often in pitifully small amounts. Donations to Mercer in the 1830's included 40½ bushels of corn, four pairs of socks, 2¼ gallons of vinegar, and an empty barrel. At a somewhat later period, a subscription of fifty cents to Bucknell's $100,000 endowment fund had to be paid in installments of 12½ cents.[31] Very few institutions could count themselves as fortunate as Howard College in Alabama which sought and found the favor of General E. D. King, a local planter. In his own simi-literate way the General was speaking to the proprietary interest which often accompanied even small gifts when he said: "Money are power and I are got it."

In the closing years of the century in particular, national church groups sensed the plight of their collegiate children and tried to build the base of aid beyond the local or regional level. Before 1900 six of the major denominational groups had formed agencies for the support and supervision of higher education, but even this aid at first was directed to worthy individuals rather than to institutions. The presidents of the church colleges welcomed the interest of the denomination but felt certain that their own efforts had to be continued. It was simply too risky to depend on financial support at the national level which was slow in building and which lacked the tug of sentimental tie to a particular favored local institution. In the period of 1886-87 when

[31]Potts, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

faculty salaries were often three to four months in arrears, President Larsen of Luther College took matters into his own hands, as he had done so frequently before, and wrote five hundred letters to ministers and laymen of the region setting forth the college's plight. The response was gratifying. Most institutions accepted gratefully what aid the national denomination could offer, realizing full well that with the increase of colleges under the sponsorship of the denomination available aid would be divided in more directions.

Within the last fifty years most of the major denominations with systems of consequence in higher education have established national agencies for aid and counsel. But fundamental problems have not been solved—probably have not been met, really. New patterns were emerging, for instance. By the middle of the 1920's the amount of aid, though still increasing in absolute terms, had begun to shrink in terms of its relation to total budgets of the aided colleges. At the same time some of the traditional pacesetters in denominational support were overtaken by newcomers to higher education. The Congregationalists, long leaders in the field, sank to a relatively low position and their place began to be taken by new groups such as the Norwegian Lutherans, the Disciples, and the Baptists. The problem of declining aid is well illustrated in recent figures from the Lutheran Church in America. Denominational support for the church's colleges increased 102% from 1956-57 to 1966-67. In the same period, however, increased financial aid given by the colleges (up 378% in the same period) had more than eaten up the increase, even allowing for some measure of federal underwriting. [32]

Elmhurst College again makes a good instance of the basic problem. Under close scrutiny and control by a denomination which was consistently unable to match its interest with dollars, Elmhurst was gradually forced to seek other means of support. It was especially hard hit by the depression of the thirties. There was a general moratorium on wage increases in that period and in 1932 the first of several wage cuts was instituted, later to reach

[32]Carlson, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

the level of 25%. An endowment drive in the same period produced something like $31,000 for operating funds in the years 1930-1933.

In 1935 the parent church announced that it could not guarantee *any* church support for the college. This prompted some talk of severing the connections with the sponsor, and the president, probably uttering the thoughts of an increasing number of college administrators, challenged the church: "Labor with us to provide adequate funds for the college to maintain its accreditation or cast off the college permitting it to secure funds independently wherever possible . . ." No action was taken on this proposal, though the church did reshape its boards through the series of denominational mergers to take account of some of the problems of the local colleges. Elmhurst, and others like it, struggled through the declining enrollments of the early fifties, its insecurities heightened by the lack of pattern of centralized giving which would be incorporated as a part of the Congregationalist contribution to the forming of the United Church of Christ. [33]

Financial aid problems in the church-related colleges have carried several characteristics which are of some importance in accounting for the continuing process of severing the cord, psychologically at least, between denomination and college. One of these characteristics was that appeals for aid were from the first necessarily phrased in broad terms, though aimed at defined audiences. In 1830 the Presbyterians of Indiana, for example, were asked to contribute twenty-five cents per person toward the $600 needed to fund a chair of theology for Hanover College. This was a state appeal rather than regional or national; even so only $100 was raised.

The Baptists recognized clearly that if they were to survive at all it would have to be because of broad local support; national organization was virtually absent. Thus, their agents sought general support, not simply from loyal Baptists. Franklin College's agent addressed his financial pleas to "The Patriot, the

---

[33]Denman, *op. cit.*, pp. 319, 492, 500-513.

Christian, and the lover of learning." An 1822 pamphlet was addressed to "the people of Maine" and made no mention of the word Baptist. The founders of Colby argued in surprisingly modern vein that the college, in addition to its service to private interests, was also an asset to the state through its low-cost education and its preparation of teachers for the public schools. In some cases non-Baptists were admitted to college boards with a resulting tension and friction, but with some significance for the breaking of denominational feelings of monopoly on individual colleges.[34]

A second characteristic lay in the tendency for denominations to link aid to colleges with the process of reform or reorganization of their educational systems. In the period from 1910-1920 the Presbyterians limited aid to those colleges which gave little promise for the future, chiefly because of poor location or excessive competition. In 1915 considerable progress had been reported toward the uniting of two colleges in Kentucky, toward securing unanimous support for one college in Oklahoma, toward a policy of concentration in Texas and Kansas, and toward the relocation of a college in Washington.[35]

The Methodist Church had "loudly called" for a "well-digested system of collegiate education" in the General Conference of 1840. That the system was slow in gaining effectiveness is indicated in the regret expressed in the "Plan of Federation of Methodist Institutions of Learning" issued by the secretary of the Board of Education in 1892. He deplored the fact that so few of the colleges founded by the denomination had become permanent and that a total of 142 had ceased to exist or had lost all Methodist relationship by 1884. The use of the word "federation" in the report's title may be suggestive of the denomination's increasing realization of its appropriate role in relation to its member colleges.[36] Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam confirmed this stance when he spoke in 1942 before the National Association

---

[34]Potts, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-26.

[35]Limbert, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

[36]Wicke, Myron F., *A Brief History of the University Senate of the Methodist Church* (Nashville: Board of Education of the Methodist Church, 1956), p. 6.

of Schools and Colleges of the Methodist Church:

> Is it possible, and, if possible, is it desirable to work for sufficient coordination of Methodist educational efforts to justify the term "Methodist" plan or purpose in education? I do not say "Methodist system." The term "system" suggests a rigidity or strait-jacketing not in the mind of the Commission.[37]

The Bishop went on to outline how through collaboration the goals of Methodism and quality education might be realized.

The plight of Wesleyan University may suggest why local colleges felt compelled to go beyond the denomination for aid. At the close of the Civil War, Wesleyan was in precarious circumstances. Enrollment had fallen from 150 students to 121. The college chose not to attempt to attract new and broader public support but turned to the Methodist Church for aid. By 1868 the papers were full of messages to Methodists in Connecticut saying that "the honor of our Church imperatively demands" additional support. In 1870 the college went counter to the trend of the times and to the wishes of the founders in changing its charter to bring the college under denominational control. Forgotten temporarily were the words of Wesleyan's first president Wilbur Fisk who in 1831 dedicated the college "not for mere sectarian purposes, but for purposes of general interest." The denomination could not respond in terms sufficient to solve the institution's problems and the relationship was permanently severed early in the present century.[38]

Still another characteristic of church-college support is the increasing breadth of vision brought to college patrons by the ecumenical thrust of recent times. With the possible exception of the fundamentalist colleges—and the generalization is weakening even there—the colleges were increasingly open to the spirit of ecumenicity and cooperation and this tended to weaken doctrinal and dollar ties with specific denominational positions and with supporting church patronage. Similarly, the patron to whom the

---

[37]Wicke, Myron F., *The Methodist Church and Higher Education 1939-1964* (Nashville: The Board of Education of the Methodist Church, 1965), p. 16.

[38]Peterson, George E., *The New England College in the Age of the University* (Amherst: Amherst College Press, 1964), p. 54ff.

college could have appealed in former years was increasingly being wooed by causes other than educational, and with considerable success. Arthur Ben Chitty analyzes it this way, speaking of Episcopal colleges:

> Failures of over two dozen colleges reflect a variety of causes, among them being a general lack of church organization which prohibited budgeted support; a non-authoritarian church government which prevented action by edict; and strangely enough a peculiar virtue characteristic of Episcopalians. It is this. The broadly educated Episcopalian has wide ranging interests and his philanthropies go far beyond his church and church colleges. He is not a parochial giver. Thus the very qualities which have made him a public spirited citizen have acted against the interests of his own colleges.[39]

The crucial test of church-college ties came, of course, with the Carnegie Foundation's attempts early in this century to provide a means of pension for faculty members in higher education.[40] Coming on the heels of the exodus of clerical trustees from the church colleges, with the eclipse of authoritarian norms of administrative behavior, and with the evisceration of the overly-pious classical curriculum, the 1906 proposal caught the church-related colleges at perhaps their greatest moment of weakness and stress in intradenominational relations. The foundation was able to label only fifty-one colleges as being completely nondenominational while more than two hundred others appeared to be more or less owned outright by some church or denominational group. The Foundation did not exclude colleges merely "in sympathy" with a church, but it was clear that the Foundation's real sympathies and monies were likely to go to the college having no difficulty in presenting itself as independent of church control and influence.

The result was predictably immediate. The Presbyterian Board of Christian Education sought to help its affiliates by publishing in effect two lists of colleges depending on closeness of

---

[39]Chitty, Arthur Ben, "Episcopal Colleges: The Quick and the Dead," (manuscript of an address originally delivered in 1947).

[40]It is tempting to speculate upon the effect of the Bundy law and similar legislation upon the denominational ties of those colleges which survived the ordeal of Carnegie temptation with relationships intact. Is there likely to be a second great institutional soul-searching and, if so, with what outcome?

relation. The trustees of Dickinson College took matters into their own hands, declaring the college to be non-sectarian, though under the friendly auspices of the Methodist Church. The trustees of Goucher declared the college to be "an independent and non-sectarian institution free from denominational control, supervision, affiliation or patronage." Bowdoin gave up a lucrative sectarian endowment to seek coverage by the Foundation. Within four years twenty college qualified for aid from the Foundation; after that the institution was required to participate in the pension plan on a matching basis and enthusiasm cooled noticeably. This in itself is a gauge of the sensitivity of the church-related college to the source from which its support can be most readily anticipated. The college has operated historically from a quite pragmatic base. It has been forced to do so.

Several hundred colleges remained sectarian under the pressure from the Carnegie money, but, according to Hofstadter and Metzger, they were "marginal institutions, financially, educationally, intellectually."[41] More important than the structural modifications necessary to qualify for Carnegie sanction were the re-evaluations of denominational relationship which took place on many campuses. When the Foundation questioned the colleges about whether church relationship improved the organization of the college, the response was almost entirely negative. In few institutions was the relationship considered an active good; rather it seemed to be something to be endured. To questions put by the Foundation most colleges replied that church connection played little if any part in the intellectual or religious life of the student body.[42] The responses, if nothing else, revealed the poverty of the relationship at that time. They also revealed the hope that a modus operandi could be devised which would be more satisfactory to each of the partners in the changing relationship. The church college has never felt the financial relationship (and all that financial support implied in program and purpose)

---

[41] Hofstadter, Richard and Walter P. Metzger, *The Development of Academic Freedom in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), p. 363.

[42] *Ibid.*, pp. 361–363.

with its denominational sponsor to be totally adequate or functional; it is likewise clear that it has been the brave college which took the steps which would choke off this modest support entirely.

Some Unanswered Questions

To this point I have been suggesting that the vision of the church-related college—seldom completely articulated as an operational guide—has been modified through the years by such factors as denominational polity and attitude; by forces of geography, control, and public favor; and by the financial arrangements which provided the pragmatic matrix of the college's affiliation with its sponsoring denomination. Further, I have suggested that these forces which shaped the vision were much more localized and specific than we have been willing to recognize. When the Congregationalists and Presbyterians struggled for the control of colleges like Wabash, Ripon, Illinois, and Marietta, it was essentially a local affair involving overly-zealous proponents of the two denominations acting in their capacities as individuals. Similarly, when the Methodists established multiple colleges in Iowa and the Presbyterians did the same in Missouri, it was as often as not a representation of local and regional aggressiveness which may have had doubtful support from the parent denomination.

I think these are important factors to keep in mind as we attempt to assess the historical background from which the college's relation to the public good derives. But there are at least three unanswered questions of an historical nature which demand examination before the true dimensions of the relationship can be outlined. In each of these questions I will be able to sketch only the bare outlines of the concern. In each of the question areas much historical searching and study are needed before the full picture will be revealed. Each of these, in its own way, fleshes out the image which the nation as a whole has of the church college, and, consequently, of its right and capacity to fill a significant role in a total system of higher education for the nation.

The Image of Church-Related Narrowness

A number of historians have argued that debate about the nature and curricular content of the church-related college is basically pointless. These colleges obviously prepared students for careers other than the ministry; they obviously had curricula which were drawn from the twin ideological streams of Athens and Jerusalem. But still fresh in my mind are the memories of a dean of a church college who felt himself constantly dealing with the stereotypical obstacle of the church-related college's image as perceived by the young faculty recruits he was trying to woo and win. The image was especially strong and especially grotesque among those who had never attended a church-related college. Their misimpression is much like that of the population as a whole, I would guess. The colleges are seen as dull in teaching, nonexistent in research, and tenacious in adherence to outworn moral codes. This, too, is part of our present.

We simply do not know enough about our heritage in this respect. One might quote from Cotton Mather's *Magnalia* in support of an early recognition of the breadth of purpose and program: "In the perusal of this Catalogue, it will be found that, besides a supply of MINISTERS for our churches from this Happy *Seminary*, we have hence had supply of *Magistrates*, as well as *Physicians*, and other *Gentlemen*, to serve the Commonwealth with their Capacities." The "Happy Seminary," Harvard, was soon outdone by Columbia whose first president Samuel Johnson presided over a curriculum that included bookkeeping, geography, and navigation, clear evidence of a new expansion of interest in keeping with a new nation.

Unfortunately for us, the image of the church-related college has been shaped not so much by the "Happy Seminary" of Mather's day, by Johnson's Columbia, or even by liberal Harvard under Eliot, but by the spirit of the Yale Report of 1828 and by the support given it by Noah Porter and James McCosh. We have been a long time freeing ourselves of the legacy of Yale, "the mother of colleges." Have we succeeded?

Or, we might point out that Harvard's first graduating class contained less than half ministers, casting some doubt on the

hopes of *New England's First Fruits.* Four graduates of the class of 1642 became clergymen, two became physicians, one a physician-minister-teacher, one a British diplomat, and one is unaccounted for. We know also that up to 1850 only about 25% of the graduates of Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth had entered the ministry; at Davidson the equivalent figure was 30% and at Randolph-Macon prior to the Civil War the percentage was twenty. But is our image also shaped, wrongly to be sure, by the fact that Luther College had only four of its twenty-six graduates fail to enter the ministry during its first ten years, and that as late as the second decade of this century it was said that half of all graduates of Hampden-Sydney became clergymen?[43]

Are we more likely to be identified in the mind of the public with the old-time president who typically received his training in the ministry and his administrative apprenticeship in a boys' academy, or with the new president who was university trained, often abroad, and who saw himself as an academic specialist? Are we more likely to have our colleges linked with the old time president–narrow, rigid, ascetic, evangelical–or with the new president portrayed as urbane, generous, statesmanlike, endowed with a large sense of humor–and the possessor of a new rational unemotional religion? The picture is confused.[44]

Finally, are we as able to present the church-related college historically as the outpost of freedom of thought and the locus of personal growth for students–or does our history emphasize the witness of parents of a Wofford College student expressed in a letter to the faculty: "We felt that if we could obtain the means of sending him to Wofford, God would convert him." They found the college's chief advantage to lie in "its wonderful success in initiating our sons into the highest science–the consciousness of God reconciled in his soul, and in the training of their spirits for heaven."

Though the quotation is nearly eighty years old, the catalogue statement of Central College, Fayette, Missouri in 1891

---

[43]Nelson, *op. cit.*, p. 97; Godbold, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

[44]Peterson, George E., *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.

may give a more current popular appraisal of the church-related college than we care to admit:

> Take care not to send those who are most near and dear to you to schools in which the Christian religion is openly attacked, or even ignored, lest while their intellects are being developed and furnished, the foundations of their religious life should be rudely torn up and the darkness and desolation of skepticism take the place of the light and comfort of the faith you have taught them at home. See to it that the mother's religion, the father's faith, the sweet influences of the pious home, are not discredited by the "philosophy, falsely so called," of the arrogant professor. Put your son into the care and keeping of Christian teachers, if you value his soul.[45]

We simply do not know enough about the fallout from the limited, sectarian defensiveness expressed in this statement. We need to know more.

The Image of Educational Isolation

Another area which needs historical explication is the notion that in recent years the church-related college has been separated from the maincurrent of higher education and has necessarily become a backwater of curricular stodginess. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century the church college had come a long way from that day in 1817 when Allegheny's founders had been able to address the assembled townspeople in the classical tongues and had received a response in kind. The Morrill Act in 1862 had provided an acceptable and attractive alternative to the church-related college and even the pious seemed determined that their children should get both a practical and humane education, in all probability in the new institution. The college had been above all a Christian manufacture; the university of Gilman, Eliot, Harper, White and Jordan surely had no interest in sectarianism and little time, it sometimes appeared, for religion itself. Increasingly, the zeal that had gone into evangelistic efforts on the campus was now redirected to matters of scholarship in the new disciplines.

An 1895 graduate of Oberlin sensed this change: "Really the old Oberlin is passing away. That is all right, if only the old spirit of self-sacrifice can be maintained. It distresses me that

---

[45]Butts, R. Freeman, *The College Charts Its Course* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939), p. 224.

the educational part in our colleges is not more thoroughly permeated with the Christian spirit, and education is looked upon so much as an end in itself." The Oberlin trustees responded a year later by stating that Oberlin, an "avowedly Christian college" from its beginning, still intended

> to lay a practical daily emphasis on the ethical and spiritual in education—on life and faith, and at the same time to allow the fullest freedom of thinking within the broadest Christian lines. The College . . . believes in a loyalty to Christian truth that should manifest itself in a persistent and earnest application of that truth to the life of the world.[46]

Oberlin might bridge the gap between the old and the new in education with positive results for its institutional reputation; other church-related colleges were not so fortunate. Many of the denominational colleges entered this century in a state of evident decline and their efforts for the next fifty years centered around organization for self-protection and sharing of limited resources and morale. They sought support for a narrowly defined concept of religion in higher education and seemed unable to break out of the marginal educational status into which fidelity to the faith, as they perceived it, had placed them. The Catholic colleges, growing in numbers and holding tightly to the tradition of the liberal arts, seemed for many the appropriate backdrop against which to evaluate the 1920 book of addresses published by John Henry McCracken, then president of Lafayette. This spokesman for church-relatedness confirmed the suspicions of many when he argued for the right of the denominational college to remain free to be educationally one-sided, to ignore whole fields of knowledge if it desired, to pick and choose its students and faculty carefully, and to remain small with emphases on religion and the training of leaders. [47]

---

[46] Barnard, John, *From Evangelicalism to Progressivism at Oberlin College 1866-1917* (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 1969), p. 103. Although not totally successful in its interpretation, the Barnard study indicates the need for other institutional research studies in the ferment-filled post-Civil War period. Oberlin's evolution as an institution was not typical of most of the hundreds of church-related colleges in the nation. Among other things, it moved toward the secularization of its curriculum with more speed and insight than other colleges could muster.

[47] Butts, *op. cit.*, p. 392. Significantly for our purposes, the title of MacCracken's work was *College and Commonwealth.*

The church-related college had lost a major skirmish, of course, with its generally anti-intellectual response to the publication of the *Origin of Species* in 1859. The question of the incompatibility of science and true religion was resolved through a series of acrimonious public tangles between the new man of the laboratory and the representative of the older faith. Almost always the former won; the latter retired to lick his spiritual wounds, to attempt a reconstruction of his theology, and to convince the public that the decline of religion in the colleges was the direct result of curricular specialization. President Wishart of Wooster might try to reconcile the two forces by including in his chapel talks the principles of the new evolution and the new physics of Rutherford, Heisenberg, and Jeans, but the public was more inclined to see the church college's need to be dragged kicking and screaming into the modern world.[48]

Individual faculty members could make personal adaptations to the new scholarship by taking up the social gospel or by joining with colleagues from public institutions in the formation of the American Economic Association, the American Sociological Society, and other disciplinary groups.[49] Institutions were more likely to respond by changing the old "Evidences of Christianity" to the more contemporary English Bible course. Even more helpful from an institutional standpoint was the adoption of what George Peterson has called the "Whole Man" idea. This was a stance better suited to the talents and resources of the smaller college and one which could be defended on rhetorical rather than empirical grounds.

The Reverend William A. Stearns had anticipated the need for this doctrine when he spoke at the Amherst inaugural in 1854:

> The end or aim of education . . . is not primarily to produce greatness in partial directions, great mathematicians, great philologists, great philosophers, but in the best sense of the term, great men—symmetrically and powerfully developed.[50]

---

[48]Barnes, Sherman B., "Learning and Piety in Ohio Colleges," *Ohio Historical Quarterly*, July, 1961, p. 233.

[49]Littell, Franklin H., *From State Church to Pluralism* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 95–97.

[50]Peterson, George E., *op. cit.*, p. 31.

Under this thesis character replaced piety as the ultimate ideal of education. Christianity became merely one of many complementary parts in the Whole Man's makeup. Gone was the harsh Puritanism and in its place came something of the gentility of the Gilded Age. Colleges still believed it was possible to produce Christian gentlemen, but this was quite different from their earlier claims to the production of Christians.[51]

From the college's standpoint, this "Whole Man" theory was broad enough to cover a good bit of collegiate anti-intellectualism while simultaneously buying time which the college sorely needed to think through its purpose in a new world. Insofar as it was understood, the concept was vapid enough to contrast badly in the public eye with the demonstrable outcomes of non-religious and vocational education at public institutions. Too often, the outcome of the church-related college appeared to be an education of "balanced mediocrity and sophisticated purposelessness."[52]

Do we really know enough about the church-related college's response to changing education conditions to fit our history into our present circumstance? I think not. We need to know much more about the church college's role in and reaction to the development of independent study, to the Liberal Arts Movement of the thirties, to increasing curricular flexibility. Has the private college's traditional claim to innovative leadership been preempted by the public institution? Our record might be better than we think.

The Image of Confused Secularization

Finally, we need to have much more historical evidence to clear up the confusion which exists among the colleges and their publics about the meaning of terms like "secularism" and "secularization." To refer to a college's going through the process of secularization may call to the public mind (and to some colleges, too) the idea of fewer students entering the ministry, or the abandonment of compulsory chapel, or the sort of evidence that

---

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

came out of Oberlin in 1911. In that year the Committee on Student Life and Work asked students to rank the possible goals of college life in order of importance. Men ranked "development of mental powers" first, while for women "acquisition of general culture" headed the list. Far down the order came "development of religious life"; it was ranked sixth for men and eighth for women in a field of eleven.[53]

But this is not what Harry E. Smith has in mind in his book *Secularization and the University*.[54] For Smith, secularization is a liberating force for higher education, freeing the institution to examine all facets of its world in the light of a God-centered theology and to take responsibility for personal and institutional stewardship in all areas of man's existence. Smith structures his ethos for the Christian institution primarily on the writings of contemporary theologians; we need to search more diligently for historical antecedents which will inform this aspect of our query as the writings of Gogarten and Bonhoeffer have done theologically for Smith's interpretation of the mission of church-related higher education.

We need to know, for instance, if the tendency of the church-related college to loosen its church ties in recent years has a parallel in the feelings of many individuals that they get along very well in life quite outside the dimensions of conventional institutionalized religion. What can history tell us? Or what can we discover about theology's becoming a more private affair at the very time when the theologically-based college is called upon to play a more public role? What does history indicate of the fate of the church-related institution in a society which finds formal theology more and more meaningless, a subject fit primarily for professional theologians?[55]

It seems to me that the recent history of Catholic colleges may be instructive here. If I read this history correctly, I see

---

[53]Barnard, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

[54]Smith, Harry E., *Secularization and the University* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1968).

[55]Kinnison, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

a group of institutions which have lately come to the realization that secularization in the Smith sense is good and that there be no need for "Catholic" versions of disciplinary study. Out of this have come some very interesting efforts at self-appraisal and increasing questions about what the Catholic institution ought to be. Whatever the problems that have faced Catholic education in the past, there was traditionally little doubt that the institution had a reason for being. Now such doubt exists and is acknowledged.[56] We would profit, I think, from an examination of the history of a college about which its president said recently: "Mundelein is needed specially in this post-conciliar era—to be open to what Pope John called signs of the times, to question, interpret, experiment, to stand as a witness to the relevance of spiritual values in our material world."

Conclusion

I have attempted to say that the inner vision of the church-related college, like the inner vision of the Supreme Court, has been discerned more clearly in the evolutions of the colleges and universities under the control of the church than it has been through carefully worked out enunciations of principle. But there has been a vision, however ineptly articulated, which has guided men and institutions down to the present time in higher education. Further, like the inner vision of the court about the future America, the vision of church-related higher education has been modified by design and by chance, by geography and by custom, by bigness of vision and by smallness of spirit in the lives of individuals. Through these modifications the vision has been adapted to the realities of our lives and to the wishes of the people, just as the court's vision has been and is being modified by daily events and by public acceptance and rejection. It matters little how ill-guided the modifications have been; the vision did bend and become flexible and living—and that is important.

It is important, too, that we not approach the discussion of "The Church-Related College and the Public Good" with a

---

[56]Hassenger, *op. cit.*, pp. 51–52.

mea culpa complex born of the painful examination of the factors of our history as institutions. It is entirely possible that the church college and its parish counterpart could not have matured other than they did, evolving as they were as spiritual institutions in an increasingly materialistic society.[57] It is entirely possible, I think, that the very modifications which we commonly think of as flaws in the vision of the church-related college hold the key to the future role of the institution in service to its world. The very responsiveness to local pressures hints at an institution which cares and which has the machinery to make care concrete. Its susceptibility to the thinking, even the pressures, of local personalities suggests that its strength lies in service to men in individual situations. Its penchant for piety and missionary commitment hints at its capacity for inspiring young people to lives of service to their world. Our historical flaws may reveal the secret of our future mission.

I assume that this is part of the question that brings us together at this conference.

---

[57] I am indebted to Professor Wilson Smith of the University of California at Davis for calling this idea to my attention.